

Malayalam

Malayalam (/ˌmələˈjɑːləm/ ^[7] Malayalam: മലയാളം, *Malayāḷam* [?], [mɐɭɐʎaː ʌɐm]) is a Dravidian language spoken in the Indian state of Kerala and the union territories of Lakshadweep and Puducherry (Mahé district) by the Malayali people. It is one of 22 scheduled languages of India spoken by nearly 2.88% of Indians. Malayalam has official language status in the state of Kerala and in the union territories of Lakshadweep and Puducherry (Mahé)^{[8][9][10]} and is spoken by 45 million people worldwide.^[11] Malayalam is also spoken by linguistic minorities in the neighbouring states; with significant number of speakers in the Nilgiris, Kanyakumari, and Coimbatore, Tenkasi, Theni districts of Tamil Nadu and Kodagu and Dakshina Kannada districts of Karnataka. Due to Malayali expatriates in the Persian Gulf, the language is also widely spoken in the Gulf countries.

The origin of Malayalam remains a matter of dispute among scholars. One view holds that Malayalam and modern Tamil are descendants of Middle Tamil and separated from it sometime after the c. 7th century AD. A second view argues for the development of the two languages out of "Proto-Dravidian" or "Proto-Tamil-Malayalam" in the prehistoric era.^{[12][13]} Designated a " Classical Language in India" in 2013,^[14] it developed into the current form mainly by the influence of the poet Thunchaththu Ezhuthachan in the 16th century. The oldest documents written purely in Malayalam and still surviving are the Vazhappally Copper plates from 832 AD and Tharisapalli Copper plates from 849 AD.

The earliest script used to write Malayalam was the Vatteluttu alphabet, and later the Kolezhuttu, which derived from it.^[15] The current Malayalam script is based on the Vatteluttu script, which was extended with Grantha script letters to adopt Indo-Aryan loanwords.^{[16][17]} The oldest literary work in Malayalam, distinct from the Tamil tradition, is dated from between the 9th and 11th centuries.^[12] The first travelogue in any Indian language is the Malayalam *Varthamanappusthakam*, written by Paremmakkal Thoma Kathanar in 1785.^{[18][19]}

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Etymology

The word *Malayalam* originated from the words *mala*, meaning " mountain", and *alam*, meaning " region" or "-ship" (as in "township"); *Malayalam* thus translates directly as "the mountain region." The term originally referred to the land of the Chera dynasty , and only later became the name of its language.^[20] The language Malayalam is alternatively called *Alealum*, *Malayalani*, *Malayali*, *Malean*, *Maliyad*, and *Mallealle*.^[21]

Malayalam	
മലയാളം <i>Malayāḷam</i>	
മലയാളം	
 <div>Malayalam in Malayalam script</div>	
Pronunciation	[mɐɭɐʎaː ʌɐm] ; ◌pronunciation
Native to	India
Region	Keralam with border communities in the Nilgiris, Kanyakumari, and Coimbatore, Tenkasi, Theni districts of Tamil Nadu and Kodagu and Dakshina Kannada districts of Karnataka, Lakshadweep & Mahé (Puducherry)
Ethnicity	Malayali
<div>Native speakers</div>	45 million (2011–2019) ^{[1][2][3]} <div></div> L2 speakers: 700,000 ^{[2]}
<div>Language family</div>	<div>Dravidian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Southern Dravidian^{[4]}<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tamil–Kannada<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tamil–Kodagu<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tamil-Malayalam<ul style="list-style-type: none">Malayalam language<ul style="list-style-type: none">Malayalam</div>
Dialects	Jeseri (Lakshadweep), Mappila, Suriyani, Judeo-Malayalam, Beary
<div>Writing system</div>	Malayalam script (Brahmic) <div> <div>Malayalam Braille</div> <div>Vatteluttu alphabet (historical)</div> <div>Kolezhuthu (historical)</div> <div>Malayanma (historical)</div> <div>Grantha (historical)</div> <div>Arabi Malayalam (historical/rarely used now)</div> <div>Syriac script (historical)</div> <div>Hebrew script</div> </div>
Official status	
<div>Official language in</div>	<div> <div> India <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kerala (State)^{[5]} Lakshadweep (Territory) </div></div>

The earliest extant literary works in the regional language of present-day Kerala probably date back to as early as the 12th century. However, the named identity of this language appears to have come into existence only around the 16th century, when it was known as "Malayayma" or "Malayanma"; the words were also used to refer to the script and the region. The word "Malayalam" was coined in the later period, and the local people referred to their language as both "Tamil" and "Malayalam" until the colonial period.^[22]

Evolution

The generally held view is that Malayalam was the western coastal dialect of Medieval Tamil^[23] and separated from Tamil sometime between the 9th and 13th centuries.^[24] Some scholars however believe that both Tamil and Malayalam developed during the prehistoric period from a common ancestor, 'Proto-Tamil-Dravidian', and that the notion of Malayalam being a 'daughter' of Tamil is misplaced.^[12] This is based on the fact that Malayalam and several Dravidian languages on the western coast have common features which are not found even in the oldest historical forms of Tamil.^[25]

Robert Caldwell, in his 1856 book "*A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages*", opined that Malayalam branched from *Classical Tamil* and over time gained a large amount of Sanskrit vocabulary and lost the personal terminations of verbs.^[20] As the language of scholarship and administration, Old-Tamil, which was written in Tamil-Brahmi and the Vatteluttu alphabet later, greatly influenced the early development of Malayalam. The Malayalam script began to diverge from the Tamil-Brahmi script in the 8th and 9th centuries. And by the end of the 13th century a written form of the language emerged which was unique from the Tamil-Brahmi script that was used to write Tamil.^[26]

	<div> <div>■ Mahé, Puducherry (Territory)</div> </div>
Regulated by	Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Government of Kerala
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	ml (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=ml)
ISO 639-2	mal (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=280)
ISO 639-3	mal
Glottolog	mala1464 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/mala1464) ^[6]
Linguasphere	49-EBE-ba
<div>  </div>	
Malayalam-speaking area	

Malayalam is similar to some Sri Lankan Tamil dialects, and the two are often mistaken by native Indian Tamil speakers.^{[27][28]}

Dialects

Variations in intonation patterns, vocabulary, and distribution of grammatical and phonological elements are observable along the parameters of region, religion, community, occupation, social stratum, style and register.

Dialects of Malayalam are distinguishable at regional and social levels,^[29] including occupational and also communal differences. The salient features of many varieties of tribal speech (e.g., the speech of Muthuvans, Malayarayas, Malai Ulladas, Kanikkars, Kadars, Paliyars, Kurumas, and Vedas) and those of the various dialects Namboothiris, Nairs, Ezhavas, Syrian Christians (Nasrani), Muslims, fishermen and many of the occupational terms common to different sections of Malayalees have been identified.^[30]

According to the Dravidian Encyclopedia, the regional dialects of Malayalam can be divided into thirteen dialect areas.^[31] They are as follows:

South Travancore	Central Travancore	West Vempanad
North Travancore	Kochi-Thrissur	South Malabar
South Eastern Palghat	North Western Palghat	Central Malabar
Wayanad	North Malabar	Kasaragod
Lakshadweep		

According to Ethnologue, the dialects are:^[21] Malabar, Nagari-Malayalam, South Kerala, Central Kerala, North Kerala, Kayavar, Namboodiri, Nair, Moplah (Mapilla), Pulaya, Nasrani, and Kasargod. The community dialects are: Namboodiri, Nair, Moplah (Mapilla), Pulaya, and Nasrani.^[21] Whereas both the Namboothiri and Nair dialects have a common nature, the Mapilla dialect is among the most divergent of dialects, differing considerably from literary Malayalam.^[21] Jeseri is a dialect of Malayalam spoken mainly in the Union territory of Lakshadweep which is nearer to Kerala.

As regards the geographical dialects of Malayalam, surveys conducted so far by the Department of Linguistics, University of Kerala restricted the focus of attention during a given study on one specific caste so as to avoid mixing up of more than one variable such as communal and geographical factors. Thus for examples, the survey of the *Ezhava* dialect of Malayalam, results of which have been published by the Department in 1974, has brought to light the existence of twelve major dialect areas for Malayalam, although the isoglosses are found to crisscross in many instances. Sub-dialect regions, which could be marked off, were found to be thirty. This number is reported to tally approximately with the number of principalities that existed during the pre-British period in Kerala. In a few instances at least, as in the case of Venad, Karappuram, Nileswaram and Kumbala, the known boundaries of old principalities are found to coincide with those of certain dialects or sub-dialects that retain their individuality even today. This seems to reveal the significance of political divisions in Kerala in bringing about dialect difference.

Divergence among dialects of Malayalam embrace almost all aspects of language such as phonetics, phonology, grammar and vocabulary. Differences between any two given dialects can be quantified in terms of the presence or absence of specific units at each level of the language. To cite a single example of language variation along the geographical parameter, it may be noted that there are as many as seventy seven different expressions employed by the Ezhavas and spread over various geographical points just to refer to a single item, namely, the flower bunch of coconut. 'Kola' is the expression attested in most of the panchayats in the Palakkad, Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram districts of Kerala, whereas 'kolachil' occurs most predominantly in Kannur and Kochi and 'klannil' in Alappuzha and Kollam. 'Kozhinnul' and 'kulannilu' are the forms most common in Trissur Idukki and Kottayam respectively. In addition to these forms most widely spread among the areas specified above, there are dozens of other forms such as 'kotumpu' (Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram), 'katirpu' (Kottayam), krali (Pathanamthitta), pattachi, gnannil (Kollam), 'pochata' (Palakkad) etc. referring to the same item.

It may be noted at this point that labels such as "Brahmin Dialect" and "Syrian Caste Dialect" refer to overall patterns constituted by the sub-dialects spoken by the subcastes or sub-groups of each such caste. The most outstanding features of the major communal dialects of Malayalam are summarized below:

- Lexical items with phonological features reminiscent of Sanskrit (e.g., *viddhi*, meaning "fool"), *bhosku* ("lie"), *musku* ("impudence"), *dustu* ("impurity"), and *eebhyan* and *sumbhan* (both meaning "good-for-nothing fellow") abound in this dialect.
- The dialect of the educated stratum among the Nairs resembles the Brahmin dialect in many respects. The amount of Sanskrit influence, however, is found to be steadily decreasing as one descends along the parameter of education.
- One of the striking features differentiating the Nair dialect from the Ezhava dialect is the phonetic quality of the word-final: an enunciative vowel unusually transcribed as "U". In the Nair dialect it is a mid-central unrounded vowel whereas in the Ezhava dialect it is often heard as a lower high back unrounded vowel.
- The Syrian Christian dialect of Malayalam is quite close to the Nair dialect, especially in phonology. The speech of the educated section among Syrian Christians and that of those who are close to the church are peculiar in having a number of assimilated as well as unassimilated loan words from English and Syriac. The few loan words which have found their way into the Christian dialect are assimilated in many cases through the process of de-aspiration.
- The Muslim dialect shows maximum divergence from the literary Standard Dialect of Malayalam. It is very much influenced by Arabic and Urdu rather than by Sanskrit or by English. The retroflex continuant *zha* of the literary dialect is realised in the Muslim dialect as the palatal *ya*.
- Tamil spoken in the Kanyakumari district has many Malayalam words.

External influences and loanwords

Malayalam has incorporated many elements from other languages over the years, the most notable of these being Sanskrit and later, English.^[32] According to Sooranad Kunjan Pillai who compiled the authoritative Malayalam lexicon, the other principal languages whose vocabulary was incorporated over the ages were Pali, Prakrit, Urdu, Hindi, Chinese, Arabic, Syriac, Dutch, and Portuguese.^[33]

Many medieval liturgical texts were written in an admixture of Sanskrit and early Malayalam, called Manipravalam.^[34] The influence of Sanskrit was very prominent in formal Malayalam used in literature. Malayalam has a substantially high amount of Sanskrit loanwords but these are seldom used.^[35] Loanwords and influences also from Hebrew, Syriac, and Ladino abound in the Jewish Malayalam dialects, as well as English, Portuguese, Syriac, and Greek in the Christian dialects, while Arabic and Persian elements predominate in the Muslim dialects. The Muslim dialect known as Mappila Malayalam is used in the Malabar region of Kerala. Another Muslim dialect called Beary bashe is used in the extreme northern part of Kerala and the southern part of Karnataka.

For a comprehensive list of loan words, see Loan words in Malayalam.

Geographic distribution and population

Rank	State/Union Territory	Malayalam speakers 2011 ^[36]	State's proportion-2011
—	<u>India</u>	34,838,819	2.88%
1	<u>Kerala</u>	32,413,213	97.03%
2	<u>Lakshadweep</u>	54,264	84.17%
3	<u>Andaman and Nicobar Islands</u>	27,475	7.22%
4	<u>Puducherry</u>	47,973	3.84%
5	<u>Karnataka</u>	726,096	1.27%
6	<u>Tamil Nadu</u>	774,057	1.01%

Malayalam is a language spoken by the native people of southwestern India (from Talapady to Kanyakumari). According to the Indian census of 2011, there were 32,299,239 speakers of Malayalam in Kerala, making up 93.2% of the total number of Malayalam speakers in India, and 96.74% of the total population of the state. There were a further 701,673 (2.1% of the total number) in Karnataka, 957,705 (2.7%) in Tamil Nadu, and 406,358 (1.2%) in Maharashtra. The number of Malayalam speakers in Lakshadweep is 51,100, which is only 0.15% of the total number, but is as much as about 84% of the population of Lakshadweep. In all, Malayalis made up 3.22% of the total Indian population in 2011. Of the total 34,713,130 Malayalam speakers in India in 2011, 33,015,420 spoke the standard dialects, 19,643 spoke the *Yerava* dialect and 31,329 spoke non-standard regional variations like *Eranadan*.^[37] As per the 1991 census data, 28.85% of all Malayalam speakers in India spoke a second language and 19.64% of the total knew three or more languages.

Large numbers of Malayalis have settled in Chennai, Bengaluru, Mangaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Navi Mumbai , Pune, Mysuru and Delhi. Many Malayalis have also emigrated to the Middle East, the United States, and Europe. There were 179,860 speakers of Malayalam in the United States, according to the 2000 census, with the highest concentrations in Bergen County, New Jersey and Rockland County, New York.^[38] There are 344,000 of Malayalam speakers in Malaysia. There were 11,687 Malayalam speakers in Australia in 2016.^[39]The 2001 Canadian census reported 7,070 people who listed Malayalam as their mother tongue, mainly in Toronto. The 2006 New Zealand census reported 2,139 speakers.^[40] 134 Malayalam speaking households were reported in 1956 in Fiji. There is also a considerable Malayali population in the Persian Gulf regions, especially in Dubai and Doha. The faster growth of languages spoken in the southern parts of India, like Malayalam, compared to those spoken in the north of the country, like Hindi, shows exactly which regions Indian immigrants to the US are coming from.^[41] Malayalam is 8th in the list of top ten fastest-growing foreign first languages spoken in UK, according to a report.^[42]

Phonology

For the consonants and vowels, the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbol is given, followed by the Malayalam character and the ISO 15919 transliteration.^[43]

Vowels

	Short			Long		
	Front	Central	Back	Front	Central	Back
Close	/i/ ഇ i	/ɨ/ * ഉ ü	/u/ ഉ u	/i:/ ഈ ī		/u:/ ഊ ū
Mid	/e/ എ e	/ə/ * അ a	/o/ ഒ o	/e:/ ഐ ē		/o:/ ഓ ō
Open		/a/ ആ a			/a:/ ഘ ā	

0:00 / 0:00

Spoken Malayalam



The first letter in Malayalam

- *ɨ/ is the *saṃvṛtōkāram*, an epenthetic vowel in Malayalam. Therefore, it has no independent vowel letter (because it never occurs at the beginning of words) but, when it comes after a consonant, there are various ways of representing it. In medieval times, it was just represented with the symbol for /u/, but later on it was just completely omitted (that is, written as an inherent vowel). In modern times, it is written in two different ways – the Northern style, in which a chandrakkala is used, and the Southern or Travancore style, in which the diacritic for a /u/ is attached to the preceding consonant and a chandrakkala is written above.
- *a/ (phonetically central: [ä]) and /ə/ are both represented as basic or "default" vowels in the Abugida script (although /ə/ never occurs word-initially and therefore does not make use of the letter അ), but they are distinct vowels.

Malayalam has also borrowed the Sanskrit diphthongs of /āu/ (represented in Malayalam as ഔ, au) and /ai/ (represented in Malayalam as ഐ, ai), although these mostly occur only in Sanskrit loanwords. Traditionally (as in Sanskrit), four vocalic consonants (usually pronounced in Malayalam as consonants followed by the *saṃvṛtōkāram*, which is not officially a vowel, and not as actual vocalic consonants) have been classified as vowels: vocalic r (ഋ, /rɨ:/, ॠ), long vocalic r (ॡ, /rɨ:/, ॢ), vocalic l (ॣ, /lɨ:/, ।) and long vocalic l (॥, /lɨ:/, ॥). Except for the first, the other three have been omitted from the current script used in Kerala as there are no words in current Malayalam that use them.

Consonants

		Labial		Dental		Alveolar		Retroflex		Palatal		Velar		Glottal
Nasal		m മ ⟨m⟩		n ന ⟨n⟩		ɳ ണ ⟨ɳ⟩		ɲ ണ ⟨ɲ⟩		ɲ ണ ⟨ɲ̠⟩		ŋ ണ ⟨ŋ⟩		
Stop	plain	p പ ⟨p⟩	b ബ ⟨b⟩	t̪ ത ⟨t̪⟩	d̪ ദ ⟨d̪⟩	t* റ്റ ⟨t̪̥⟩	t ട ⟨t̪̥⟩	ɖ ഡ ⟨ɖ̪̥⟩	ʈ ഛ ⟨c̪̥⟩	ɖʑ ജ ⟨j̪̥⟩	k ക ⟨k̪̥⟩	g ഗ ⟨g̪̥⟩		
	aspirated		bʰ ഭ ⟨bh̥⟩	t̪ʰ ഥ ⟨th̥⟩	d̪ʰ ധ ⟨dh̥⟩		tʰ ഠ ⟨ṭh̥⟩	ɖʰ ഢ ⟨ḍh̥⟩	ʈʰ ഠ ⟨ṣh̥⟩	ɖʑʰ ഢ ⟨j̪h̥⟩	kʰ ഖ ⟨kh̥⟩	gʰ ഘ ⟨gh̥⟩		
Fricative		f ഫ ⟨f⟩		s സ ⟨s⟩			ʂ ഷ ⟨ʂ̪̥⟩		ɕ ഷ ⟨ɕ̪̥⟩				h ഹ ⟨h̥⟩	
Approximant	central	ɹ റ ⟨v̪̥⟩					ɻ റ ⟨ɻ̪̥⟩		j യ ⟨y̪̥⟩					
	lateral					ɭ ല ⟨l̪̥⟩	ɭ ള ⟨ɭ̪̥⟩							
Tap or Flap						ɾ റ ⟨r̪̥⟩								
Trill						ɾ റ ⟨ɾ̪̥⟩								

- The unaspirated alveolar plosive stop once had a separate character but it has become obsolete, as the sound only occurs in geminate form (when geminated it is written with a റ below another റ) or immediately following other consonants (in these cases, റ or ററ are usually written in small size underneath the first consonant). The archaic letter can be found in the ⟨t̪⟩ row here [3] (<https://web.archive.org/web/20060714032632/http://homepage.ntlworld.com/stone-catend/trimain3.htm>).
- The alveolar nasal also had a separate character that is now obsolete (it can be seen in the ⟨ɳ̠⟩ row here [4] (<https://web.archive.org/web/20060714032632/http://homepage.ntlworld.com/stone-catend/trimain3.htm>)) and the sound is now almost always represented by the symbol that was originally used only for the dental nasal. However, both sounds are extensively used in current colloquial and official Malayalam, and although they were allophones in Old Malayalam, they now occasionally contrast in gemination – for example, *ennāl* ("by me", first person singular pronoun in the instrumental case) and *ennāl* ("if that is so", elided from the original *entāl*), which are both written *ennāl*.
- The letter ഹ represents both /pʰ/, a phoneme occurring in Sanskrit loanwords, and /f/, which is mostly found in comparatively recent borrowings from European languages.
- The voiceless unaspirated plosives, the voiced unaspirated plosives, the nasals and the laterals can be geminated.^[43]
- The retroflex lateral is clearly retroflex, but may be more of a flap [ɭ̠] (= [ɭ̠]) than an approximant [ɭ̠]. The approximant /ɭ̠/ has both rhotic and lateral qualities, and is indeterminate between an approximant and a fricative, but is laminal post-alveolar rather than a true retroflex. The articulation changes part-way through, perhaps explaining why it behaves as both a rhotic and a lateral, both an approximant and a fricative, but the nature of the change is not understood.^[44]
- In a few dialects consonants are no longer aspirated and have merged with the modal voice

Number system and other symbols

Word (translated)	"Tree"		"Elephant"		"Human"	
Case	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	
Nominative	മരം <i>maram</i>	മരങ്ങൾ <i>maraṅgaḷ</i>	ആന <i>āṇa</i>	ആനകൾ <i>āṇakaḷ</i>	മനുഷ്യൻ <i>maṇuṣyaṇ</i>	മനുഷ്യർ <i>maṇuṣu</i>
Vocative	മരമേ <i>maramē</i>	മരങ്ങളേ <i>maraṅgaḷē</i>	ആനേ <i>āṇē</i>	ആനകളേ <i>āṇakaḷē</i>	മനുഷ്യാ <i>maṇuṣyā</i>	മനുഷ്യരേ <i>maṇuṣu</i>
Accusative	മരത്തെ <i>maratte</i>	മരങ്ങളെ <i>maraṅgaḷe</i>	ആനയെ <i>āṇaye</i>	ആനകളെ <i>āṇakaḷe</i>	മനുഷ്യനെ <i>maṇuṣyaṇe</i>	മനുഷ്യരെ <i>maṇuṣu</i>
Genitive	മരത്തിന്റെ <i>marathinṭe</i>	മരങ്ങളുടെ <i>maraṅgaḷuṭe</i>	ആനയുടെ <i>āṇayuṭe</i>	ആനകളുടെ <i>āṇakaḷuṭe</i>	മനുഷ്യന്റെ <i>maṇuṣyaṇṭe</i>	മനുഷ്യരുടെ <i>maṇuṣu</i>
Dative	മരത്തിന് <i>marathinu</i>	മരങ്ങൾക്ക് <i>maraṅgaḷkku</i>	ആനയ്ക്ക് <i>āṇaykku</i>	ആനകൾക്ക് <i>āṇakaḷkku</i>	മനുഷ്യന് <i>maṇuṣyaṇu</i>	മനുഷ്യർക്ക് <i>maṇuṣu</i>
Instrumental	മരത്താൽ <i>marathāl</i>	മരങ്ങളാൽ <i>maraṅgaḷāl</i>	ആനയാൽ <i>āṇayāl</i>	ആനകളാൽ <i>āṇakaḷāl</i>	മനുഷ്യനാൽ <i>maṇuṣyaṇāl</i>	മനുഷ്യരോട് <i>maṇuṣu</i>
Locative	മരത്തിൽ <i>marathil</i>	മരങ്ങളിൽ <i>maraṅgaḷil</i>	ആനയിൽ <i>āṇayil</i>	ആനകളിൽ <i>āṇakaḷil</i>	മനുഷ്യനിൽ <i>maṇuṣyaṇil</i>	മനുഷ്യരിൽ <i>maṇuṣu</i>
Sociative	മരത്തോട് <i>marathōṭu</i>	മരങ്ങളോട് <i>maraṅgaḷōṭu</i>	ആനയോട് <i>āṇayōṭu</i>	ആനകളോട് <i>āṇakaḷōṭu</i>	മനുഷ്യനോട് <i>maṇuṣyaṇōṭu</i>	മനുഷ്യരോട് <i>maṇuṣu</i>

Words adopted from Sanskrit

When words are adopted from Sanskrit, their endings are usually changed to conform to Malayalam norms:

Nouns

- Masculine Sanskrit nouns with a word stem ending in a short /a/ take the ending /an/ in the nominative singular. For example, കൃഷ്ണ → കൃഷ്ണan. The final /n/ is dropped before masculine surnames, honorifics, or titles ending in /an/ and beginning with a consonant other than /n/ – e.g., "Krishna Menon", "Krishna Kaniyaan" etc., but "Krishnan Ezhutthachan". Surnames ending with /ar/ or /aḷ/ (where these are plural forms of "an" denoting respect) are treated similarly – "Krishna Pothuval", "Krishna Chakyar", but "Krishnan Nair", "Krishnan Nambiar", as are Sanskrit surnames such "Varma(n)", "Sharma(n)", or "Gupta(n)" (rare) – e.g., "Krishna Varma", "Krishna Sharman". If a name is a compound, only the last element undergoes this transformation – e.g., "കൃഷ്ണ" + "dēva" = "കൃഷ്ണadēvan", not "കൃഷ്ണandēvan".
- Feminine words ending in a long /ā/ or /ī/ are changed to end in a short /a/ or /i/, for example "സീത" → "Sīta" and "ലക്ഷ്മി" → "Lakṣmi". However, the long vowel still appears in compound words, such as "Sītādēvi" or" Lakṣmīdēvi". The long ī is generally reserved for the vocative forms of these names, although in Sanskrit the vocative actually takes a short /i/. There are also a small number of nominative /ī/ endings that have not been shortened – a prominent example being the word "strī" for "woman".
- Nouns that have a stem in /-an/ and which end with a long /ā/ in the masculine nominative singular have /vū/ added to them, for example "ബ്രഹ്മ" (stem "Brahman") → "Brahmāvū". When the same nouns are declined in the neuter and take a short /a/ ending in Sanskrit, Malayalam adds an additional /m/, e.g. "Brahma" (neuter nominative singular of "Brahman") becomes "Brahmam". This is again omitted when forming compounds.
- Words whose roots end in /-an/ but whose nominative singular ending is /-a-/ (for example, the Sanskrit root of "karma" is actually "karman") are also changed. The original root is ignored and "karma" (the form in Malayalam being "karmam" because it ends in a short /a/) is taken as the basic form of the noun when declining.^[49] However, this does not apply to all consonant stems, as "unchangeable" stems such as "manas" ("mind") and "suhṛ̥t" ("friend") are identical to the Malayalam nominative singular forms (although the regularly derived "manam" sometimes occurs as an alternative to "manas").
- Sanskrit words describing things or animals rather than people with a stem in short /a/ end with an /m/ in Malayalam. For example,"രാംയാണ" → "Rāmāyaṇam". In most cases, this is actually the same as the Sanskrit accusative case ending, which is also /m/ (or, allophonically, anusvara due to the requirements of the sandhi word-combining rules) in the neuter nominative. However, "things and animals" and "people" are not always differentiated based on whether or not they are sentient beings; for example, "নারসিংহা" becomes "Narasimha" and not "Narasimhan", whereas "Ananta" becomes "Anantan" even though both are sentient. This does not strictly correspond to the Sanskrit neuter gender, as both "Narasimha" and "Ananta" are masculine nouns in the original Sanskrit.
- Nouns with short vowel stems other than /a/, such as "വിষ্ণു", "Prajāpati" etc. are declined with the Sanskrit stem acting as the Malayalam nominative singular (the Sanskrit nominative singular is formed by adding a visarga, e.g., as in "Viṣṇuḥ")
- The original Sanskrit vocative is often used in formal or poetic Malayalam, e.g. "Harē" (for "Hari") or "Prabhō" (for "Prabhu" – "Lord"). This is restricted to certain contexts – mainly when addressing deities or other exalted individuals, so a normal man named Hari would usually be addressed using a Malayalam vocative such as "Harī". The Sanskrit genitive is also occasionally found in Malayalam poetry, especially the

personal pronouns "mama" ("my" or "mine") and "tava" ("thy" or "thine"). Other cases are less common and generally restricted to the realm of Manipravāḷam.

- Along with these tatsama borrowings, there are also many tadbhava words in common use. These were incorporated via borrowing before the separation of Malayalam and Tamil. As the language did not then accommodate Sanskrit phonology as it now does, words were changed to conform to the Old Tamil phonological system, for example "Kṛṣṇa" → "Kaṇṇan".^[50] Most of his works are oriented on the basic Malayalam family and cultures and many of them were path-breaking in the history of Malayalam literature

Writing system

Historically, several scripts were used to write Malayalam. Among these were the Vatteluttu, Kolezhuthu and Malayanma scripts. But it was the Grantha script, another Southern Brahmi variation, which gave rise to the modern Malayalam script. It is syllabic in the sense that the sequence of graphic elements means that syllables have to be read as units, though in this system the elements representing individual vowels and consonants are for the most part readily identifiable. In the 1960s Malayalam dispensed with many special letters representing less frequent conjunct consonants and combinations of the vowel /u/ with different consonants.

Malayalam script consists of a total of 578 characters. The script contains 52 letters including 16 vowels and 36 consonants, which forms 576 syllabic characters, and contains two additional diacritic characters named anusvāra and visarga.^{[51][52]} The earlier style of writing has been superseded by a new style as of 1981. This new script reduces the different letters for typesetting from 900 to fewer than 90. This was mainly done to include Malayalam in the keyboards of typewriters and computers.

In 1999 a group named "Rachana Akshara Vedi" produced a set of free fonts containing the entire character repertoire of more than 900 glyphs. This was announced and released along with a text editor in the same year at Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala. In 2004, the fonts were released under the GNU GPL license by Richard Stallman of the Free Software Foundation at the Cochin University of Science and Technology in Kochi, Kerala.

Malayalam has been written in other scripts like Roman, Syriac^{[53][54][55]} and Arabic. Suriyani Malayalam was used by Saint Thomas Christians (also known as Nasranis) until the 19th century.^{[53][54][55]} Arabic scripts particularly were taught in madrasahs in Kerala and the Lakshadweep Islands.^{[56][57]}

Literature

The earliest Malayalam inscription discovered until now is the Edakal-5 inscription (ca. late 4th century – early 5th century).^[58] The early literature of Malayalam comprised three types of composition: Malayalam Nada, Tamil Nada and Sanskrit Nada.

- Classical songs known as Nadan Pattu
- Manipravalam of the Sanskrit tradition, which permitted a generous interspersing of Sanskrit with Malayalam. Niranam poets^[59] Manipravalam Madhava Panikkar, Sankara Panikkar and Rama Panikkar wrote Manipravalam poetry in the 14th century.
- The folk song rich in native elements

Malayalam poetry to the late 20th century betrays varying degrees of the fusion of the three different strands. The oldest examples of Pattu and Manipravalam, respectively, are *Ramacharitam* and *Vaishikatantram*, both from the 12th century.^[60]

The earliest extant prose work in the language is a commentary in simple Malayalam, *Bhashakautalyam* (12th century) on Chanakya's *Arthashastra*. Adhyatmaramayanam by Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan (known as the father of modern Malayalam literature) who was born in Tirur, one of the most important works in Malayalam literature. Unnunili Sandesam written in the 14th century is amongst the oldest literary works in Malayalam language.^[61]

By the end of the 18th century some of the Christian missionaries from Kerala started writing in Malayalam but mostly travelogues, dictionaries and religious books. Varthamanappusthakam (1778), written by Paremmakkal Thoma Kathanar^[62] is considered to be the first travelogue in an Indian language.

Early period

The earliest known poem in Malayalam, *Ramacharitam*, dated to the 12th to 14th century, was completed before the introduction of the Sanskrit alphabet. It shows the same phase of the language as in Jewish and Nasrani *Sasanas* (dated to mid-8th century).^[20] But the period of the earliest available literary document cannot be the sole criterion used to determine the antiquity of a language. In its early literature, Malayalam has songs, *Pattu*, for various subjects and occasions, such as harvesting, love songs, heroes, gods, etc. A form of writing called *Campu* emerged from the 14th century onwards. It mixed poetry with prose and used a vocabulary strongly influenced by Sanskrit, with themes from epics and *Puranas*.^[26]

Rama-charitam, which was composed in the 14th century A.D., may be said to have inaugurated Malayalam literature just as Naniah's *Mahabharatam* did for Telugu. The fact is that dialectical and local peculiarities had already developed and stamped themselves in local songs and ballads. But these linguistic variations were at last gathered together and made to give a coloring to a sustained literary work, the *Rama-charitam*, thereby giving the new language a justification and a new lease on life.

The Malayalam language, with the introduction of a new type of devotional literature, underwent a metamorphosis, both in form and content, and it is generally held that modernity in Malayalam language and literature commenced at this period. This change was brought about by Thunchathu Ezhuthachan (16th century) who is known as the father of modern Malayalam literature. Till this time Malayalam indicated two different courses of development depending on its relationship with either Sanskrit or Tamil–Kannada languages.



Malayalam Script (Aksharamala) letters



A public notice board written using Malayalam script. The Malayalam language possesses official recognition in the state of Kerala, and the union territories of Lakshadweep and Puducherry



A Malayalam board with traditional style letter Ila (ഇല) from Thiruvananthapuram.



Kerala Sahitya Akademy at Thrissur



Malayalam letters on old Travancore Rupee coin

The earliest literary work in Malayalam now available is a prose commentary on Chanakya's Arthashastra, ascribed to the 13th century. The poetical works called Vaisikatantram are also believed to belong to the early 14th century. These works come under a special category known as Manipravalam, literally the combination of two languages, the language of Kerala and Sanskrit. A grammar and rhetoric in this hybrid style was written sometime in the 14th century in Sanskrit and the work, called the Lilitikalam, is the main source of information for a student of literary and linguistic history.

According to this book, the Manipravalam and Pattu styles of literary compositions were in vogue during this period. "Pattu" means "song" and more or less represents the pure Malayalam school of poetry. From the definition of the Pattu style given in the Lilitikalam, it can be surmised that the language of Kerala during this period was more or less in line with Tamil, but this has misled many people to believe incorrectly that Malayalam was itself Tamil during this period and before.

The latest research shows that Malayalam as a separate spoken language in Kerala began showing independent lines of development from its parental tongue Proto-Tamil-Malayalam (which is not modern Tamil), preserving the features of the earliest Dravidian tongue, which only in due course gave birth to the literary form of Tamil, namely Sen Tamil and Malayalam, the spoken form of which is prevalent in Kerala. However, till the 13th century there is no hard evidence to show that the language of Kerala had a literary tradition except in folk songs.

The literary tradition consisted of three early Manipravalam Champus, a few Sandesa Kavyas and innumerable amorous compositions on the courtesans of Kerala, which throb with literary beauty and poetical fancies, combined with a relishing touch of realism about them with regard to the then social conditions. Many prose works in the form of commentaries upon Puranic episodes form the bulk of the classical works in Malayalam.

The Pattu (a sutra devoted to define this pattern is termed a pattu) school also has major works like the Ramacharitam (12th century), and the Bhagavad Gita (14th century) by a set of poets belonging to one family called the Kannassas. Some of them like Ramacharitam have a close resemblance to the Tamil language during this period. This is to be attributed to the influence of Tamil works on native poets belonging to areas that lie close to the Tamil country.

It was during the 16th and 17th centuries that later Champu kavyas were written. Their specialty was that they contained both Sanskritic and indigenous elements of poetry to an equal degree, and in that manner were unique.

Unnaiy Varyar, whose Nalacharitan Attakkatha is popular even today, was the most prominent poet of the 18th century among not only the Kathakali writers, but also among the classical poets of Kerala. He is often referred to as the Kalidasa of Kerala. Although Kathakali is a dance drama and its literary form should more or less be modeled after the drama, there is nothing more in common between an Attakkatha and Sanskrit drama.

That is to say, the principles of dramaturgy to be observed in writing a particular type of Sanskrit drama are completely ignored by an author of Attakkatha. Delineation of a particular rasa is an inevitable feature with Sanskrit drama, whereas in an Attakkatha all the predominant rasas are given full treatment, and consequently the theme of an Attakkatha often loses its integrity and artistic unity when viewed as a literary work.

Any Attakkatha fulfills its objective if it affords a variety of scenes depicting different types of characters, and each scene would have its own hero with the rasa associated with that character. When that hero is portrayed he is given utmost importance, to the utter neglect of the main sentiment (rasa) of the theme in general. However, the purpose of Attakkatha is not to present a theme with a well-knit emotional plot as its central point, but to present all approved types of characters already set to suit the technique of the art of Kathakali.

The major literary output of the century was in the form of local plays composed for the art of kathakali, the dance dramas of Kerala also known as Attakkatha. It seems the Gitagovinda of Jayadeva provided a model for this type of literary composition. The verses in Sanskrit narrate the story and the dialogue is composed in imitation of songs in the Gitagovinda, set to music in appropriate ragas in the classical Karnataka style.

Besides the Raja of Kottarakkara and Unnaiy Varyar referred to above, nearly a hundred plays were composed during this century by poets belonging to all categories and subscribing to all standards, such as Irayimman Tampi and Ashvati Raja, to mention just two.

Devotional literature in Malayalam found its heyday during the early phase of this period. Ezhuthachan referred to above gave emphasis to the Bhakti cult. The Jnanappana by Puntanam Nambudiri is a unique work in the branch of philosophical poetry. Written in simple language, it is a sincere approach to the advaita philosophy of Vedanta.

It took nearly two centuries for a salutary blending of the scholarly Sanskrit and popular styles to bring Malayalam prose to its present form, enriched in its vocabulary by Sanskrit but at the same time flexible, pliable and effective as to popular parlance.

As regards literature, the leading figures were Irayimman Thampi and Vidwan Koithampuran, both poets of the royal court. Their works abound in a beautiful and happy blending of music and poetry. The former is surely the most musical poet of Kerala and his beautiful lullaby commencing with the line Omana Thinkalkidavo has earned him an everlasting name. But the prime reason why he is held in such high esteem in Malayalam is the contribution he has made to Kathakali literature by his three works, namely the Dakshayagam, the Kichakavadham and the Uttara-svayamvaram. The latter's Kathakali work Ravana Vijayam has made him immortal in literature.

Impact of European scholars

The first printed book in Kerala was Doctrina Christam, written by Henrique Henriques in Lingua Malabar Tamul. It was transliterated and translated into Malayalam, and printed by the Portuguese in 1578.^{[63][64]} In the 16th and 17th centuries, Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan was the first to substitute Grantha-Malayalam script for the Tamil Vatteluttu alphabet. Ezhuthachan, regarded as the father of the modern Malayalam literature, undertook an elaborate translation of the ancient Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata into Malayalam. His Adhyatma Ramayana and Mahabharata are still read with religious reverence by the Malayalam-speaking Hindu community. Kunchan Nambiar, the founder of Tullal, was a prolific literary figure of the 18th century.

The British printed Malabar English Dictionary (<http://www.hindu.com/2005/10/14/stories/2005101407670300.htm>) by Graham Shaw in 1779 was still in the form of a Tamil-English Dictionary.^[65] The Syrian Christians of Kerala started to learn the Tulu-Grantha Bhasha of Nambudiris under the British Tutelage. Paremmakkal Thoma Kathanar wrote the first Malayalam travelogue called Varthamanappusthakam in 1789.

The educational activities of the missionaries belonging to the Basel Mission deserve special mention. Hermann Gundert, (1814–1893), a German missionary and scholar of exceptional linguistic talents, played a distinguishable role in the development of Malayalam literature. His major works are Keralolpathi (1843), Pazhancholmala (1845), Malayalabhaasha Vyakaranam (1851), Paathamala (1860) the first Malayalam school text book, Kerala pazhama (1868), the first



Cover page of Nasranikal okkekum ariyendunna samskhepavedartham which is the first book to be printed in Malayalam in 1772.

[illegible]

Kumaran Asan's celebrated poem, *Veena Poovu (The Fallen Flower)* depicts in a symbolic manner the tragedy of human life in a moving and thought-provoking manner. Vallathol's *Bandhanasthanaya Aniruddhan*, which demonstrates an exceptionally brilliant power of imagination and deep emotional faculties, depicts a situation from the Puranic story of Usha and Aniruddha. Ulloor S. P. Iyer was another veteran who joined the new school. He wrote a series of poems like *Oru Mazhathulli* in which he excelled as a romantic poet.

The three more or less contemporary poets Kumaran Asan, Vallathol Narayana Menon and Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer considerably enriched Malayalam poetry. Some of their works reflect social and political movements of that time. Asan wrote about untouchability in Kerala; Ulloor's writings reflect his deep devotion and admiration for the great moral and spiritual values, which he believed were the real assets of ancient social life of India. They were known as the trio of Malayalam poetry. After them there were others like K. K. Nair and K. M. Panikkar who contributed to the growth of poetry.

See also

- Beary bashe
- Bible translations into Malayalam
- Malayali
 - Arabi Malayalam
- Judeo-Malayalam
- Malayalam calendar
- Malayalam literature
- Malayalam poetry
- Malayalam cinema
- Manipravalam
- Suriyani Malayalam
- Tulu script
- Palindrome

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